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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BELMOPAN 000526

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TAGS: [AEMR](#) [EAID](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [AMGT](#) [BH](#)  
SUBJECT: TFM01: BELIZE PRELIMINARY DAMAGE ASSESSMENT AND  
ASSISTANCE REQUEST

PASS OFDA

REF: BELMOPAN 0524

¶1. SUMMARY: The GOB is requesting international assistance to deal with the aftermath of Hurricane Dean. Prime Minister Musa declared two northern districts disaster areas. Urgent needs include equipment to test the safety of water supplies, bulk food to replenish stockpiles used in the emergency, road repair equipment and materials to rebuild houses damaged or destroyed by the storm. Damage to agriculture, including the export-oriented papaya and sugar industries, is significant and will require assistance both to replant and to provide income support to small farmers until the next crop can be harvested. Although the overall numbers may seem small, for a country the size of Belize they represent a significant hit to the economy. Based on the needs assessment we will request separately release of \$50,000 in disaster assistance funds. The Foreign Minister expressed appreciation for the OFDA presence as part of the national response and also thanked us for the prompt offer of helicopter support from JTF-Bravo. END SUMMARY.

¶2. The Foreign Ministry provided August 22 a briefing for heads of diplomatic missions on damage from Hurricane Dean as well as a list of assistance requests. The Minister and CEO (deputy minister equivalent) stressed that the assessment and lists were preliminary and that more details would be provided in the next 24 hours.

DAMAGE

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¶3. Overall Dean did much less damage than expected and there have been so far no reports of loss of life or serious injury. Major infrastructure including highways and bridges is intact and roads are generally passable. However, power is still out in the north, bringing problems such as lack of water and breakdowns in telephone service. (FYI: Belize buys electricity for the north from Mexico and there is no word on when the flow from Mexico will be resumed. END FYI.) The storm did significant damage to housing and agriculture in the two northern districts, Orange Walk and Corozal. Damage to the northern barrier reef islands (cayes) is still being assessed but the tourism industry clearly has also suffered some losses.

¶4. PM Musa has declared Corozal and Orange Walk districts disaster areas. The preliminary GOB assessment of damage to various sectors in the north (all figures quoted in US\$) is:

-- Housing \$5 million. Hundreds of homes were destroyed, 1,500 - 2,000 were damaged and there are estimates of 2,000 homeless in the northern districts. Most are staying with family and friends or in government shelters.

-- Papaya industry: \$20 - 22 million. The entire export crop appears to have been destroyed. (FYI: One of the major investors in

the industry is U.S.-based Brooks Tropicals. End FYI.)

-- Sugar industry: \$1.2 million, but this will likely change as ground assessments provide more details than aerial assessments. Sugar exports are a \$50 million industry employing 9,000 farmers and 2,000 workers, roughly one-seventh of the population of the two northern districts. Loss of farm income will be significant, and loss of export earnings could hurt the GOB's ability to service its external debt.

-- Aquaculture industry: no firm figure yet but likely \$1 million or more.

15. Rains associated with Dean will have an impact in coming days on river levels and the GOB anticipates significant flooding in the north. This could hamper rebuilding efforts and movement of supplies. It could also further damage agricultural land and crops.

#### ASSISTANCE REQUEST

16. Urgent needs identified by the MFA are:

-- Equipment to test safety of drinking water;

-- Bulk food (rice, beans flour, milk powder, cooking oil and canned food) to replace that taken from stockpiles so far (NOTE: The GOB requested cash to buy this locally rather than ship it. END NOTE.)

-- Agricultural and road equipment to repair roads in the papaya and sugar cane fields, including three to five each: graders, bulldozers, front end loaders and dump trucks.

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17. Longer term the GOB notes that it may need more food to tide farmers over for several month from the loss of income from their crops. Alternatively there may be need for small grants to provide cash to see families through until the next crops are in.

18. The Foreign Minister told Charge that the GOB appreciated the USG's quick response in sending an OFDA rep to work with the National Emergency Management Organization in advance of the hurricane and providing three helicopters and associated military personnel from JTF-Bravo.

#### USG ACTION

19. OFDA rep Armbrister attended a donors' meeting with UN agencies and the Red Cross a few hours after the MFA briefing. Based on the needs assessments done to date we will request by septel authority to release \$50,000 of emergency funds. An additional urgent need noted was a portable generator that could be transported to villages to run water pumps and fill reservoirs. These cannot be obtained in Belize and will have to be brought in from outside. OFDA is coordinating with other donors to minimize gaps and overlaps in assistance. Embassy has been coordinating with the British High Commission since the hurricane to ensure that our capabilities and efforts are in sync.

#### LOOKING AHEAD

110. The MFA briefing as well as the NEMO head note that there are still more than three months left in the 2007 hurricane season. The Western Caribbean traditionally gets hit later than this, so Dean may not be the last hurricane Belize will have to deal with this year. Replenishment of emergency stockpiles will be an important job in the near term.

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